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SUBJECT: ASG BEHEADS SEVEN HOSTAGES ON JOLO

REF: A. MANILA 1231
[B](#). MANILA 1206
[C](#). MANILA 1187

[1](#). (SBU) Summary. The Abu Sayyaf Group has reportedly beheaded seven Philippine hostages on Jolo. Rogue MNLF Commander Habier Malik remains on the run, but defiant. The AFP has reiterated it is only after him and his lawless followers, not the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). MNLF Vice-Chairman Jimmy Labuan has called for three-way talks among the government, MNLF, and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The USG has granted \$75,000 to the Save the Children Federation for immediate relief assistance to the families on Jolo, while other donors have donated food supplies. Exact numbers of internally displaced persons are not yet available, but local authorities are making plans for better assessments and distribution programs. End Summary.

Hostages Beheaded

[2](#). (U) Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Colonel Mark Antonio Supnet confirmed publicly that suspected Abu Sayyaf Group members under Albader Parad appear to have decapitated the seven Philippine workers taken hostage on Jolo Island recently (ref a). Unknown elements on April 19 dropped off the seven severed heads near two Philippine military detachments in Parang and Indanan after the company that employed six of the workers had refused to pay a 5 million peso ransom.

Malik on the Run

[3](#). (U) Rogue MNLF Commander Habier Malik remains on the run in Jolo. He gave a defiant telephone interview to a national television channel on April 19, claiming that the AFP treated its own soldiers like "animals" and that all he and his followers wanted was peace. AFP Chief of Staff General Esperon reiterated in a separate television interview on April 20 that the AFP targeted only Malik and his followers in response to their attacks on the AFP and civilians, and did not intend or wish to go after law-abiding elements of the MNLF.

[4](#). (U) According to press reports, Philippine health officials on Jolo have said that at least six civilians, mostly children, have died in recent days from shrapnel or gunshot wounds related to the fighting between Malik's forces and the AFP, with at least another ten wounded.

Pressure From OIC?

15. (SBU) MNLF Vice-Chairman Jimmy Labuan indicated publicly that the MNLF would not intervene to help the AFP capture Malik, and called instead for three-ways talks among the Philippine government, MNLF, and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu has reportedly appealed to OIC members, especially those with close ties to the Philippines and MNLF, to use their influence to end the armed conflict with Malik on Jolo.

16. (SBU) The Philippines, which continues to seek observer status in the OIC, has reportedly now received an invitation as a "special guest" from Pakistan to the 34th Session of the Islamic Conference on Foreign Ministers in Islamabad from May 15-17.

Displaced Persons

17. (SBU) The USG, through USAID, has granted \$75,000 to the Save the Children Federation as immediate relief assistance to the families on Jolo affected by this armed conflict initiated by Malik. The relief items, including temporary shelter materials, water containers, cooking utensils, and hygiene kits, will go through the Mindanao Emergency Response Network composed of local NGOs and community-based groups.

18. (SBU) Authorities on Jolo have formed a technical group including the Philippine National Red Cross, the Integrated

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Provincial Health Office, the Department of Public Works and Housing, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Education, the Philippine National Police, the Provincial Engineers' Office, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to determine how best to conduct an accurate assessment and to provide effective aid to "permissive, semi-permissive, and hostile environments." There are no truly reliable estimates of the number of internally displaced persons yet, although Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza and others have estimated that it may be as high as 45,000 individuals. According to the provincial government, the United Nations World Food Program, the Regional Government of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the Sulu Provincial Government, and local politicians Munir Arbison and Sakur Tan (who are running for Sulu Congressman and Governor, respectively) have already donated rice, noodles, sardines, and/or noodles.

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